



Viola Grace

Sector Guard 4

SEERING
ORDER

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Seering Order
Copyright © 2009 Viola Grace
ISBN: 978-1-55487-390-6
Cover art by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by Devine Destinies
An imprint of eXtasy Books
Look for us online at:
www.devinedestinies.com

**SEERING ORDER
BOOK 4 OF THE
SECTOR GUARD**

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

Sector Guard Base - Morganti

“Oh, it’s wonderful to be back home.” Aggie stretched and looked out the window, admiring the view of the Morganti base, then turned around and admired the view of her husband stripping off for sleep. Pretty. A flicker of light caught her eye and she turned back to the window. “What the hell is that?”

“If I don’t miss my guess, it is Draï in a mid-air intimacy. I would avoid flying if you don’t know where they are. That is a surprise you don’t want.” Haaro came up behind her and watched the pool of fire and wind in the sky settle to a glowing point that trailed to the dragon’s home in the hills.

“Mid-air mating, huh? I wonder if we could try that one day.” She turned in her mate’s arms and ran her hands over his skin, relearning the planes and angles of his body. She never tired of him, it was a round of study that she would always embrace.

“We will have to make sure that they are off planet. Mid-air interaction is not for the faint of

heart. It may take a bit of practice before we can get it just right." His hands pulled her hips against him. His eyes and horns gleamed in the dim light of the oncoming sunset.

"Well, my husband, let's get practicing." They laughed, together and then laughter stilled as they kissed and tangled together, practicing.

Planet Calor

Reva sighed and looked at her herd. She took a deep breath and gave them her order, *"Hands off, stand together and line up. Time to leave the market."* The fifty minor members of the Roci family lined up and prepared to return to their home.

It never failed to amaze Reva that her odd talent was best used as a nanny. Occasionally, the Matriarch would call for her service when she was laying a particularly difficult clutch, but other than that, she was left to the care and wrangling of the Matriarch's brood. Not a bad job for a slave from Geehoe Nine.

Reva had been born and raised as a slave. She had survived situations that should have driven her mad, and after years of assorted servitude, she had ended up on Calor, watching the young of a species that used to frighten her with its ferocity.

The first time one of her charges ate one of its

siblings, she had cowered in fear of her owners destroying her for dereliction of duty. They had merely laughed and patted the aggressor on the back, saying that he was almost an adult now and would soon need to leave the nest. K'ket children had the snapping claws of their parents, but did not develop the venom until in their second year of adulthood. Their arching, stinging tail was their primary weapon in mating battles. It also served them well in trade. No one wanted to piss off something that could, and would, stab them through the heart with little or no warning.

Her herd of deadly children moved swiftly through the streets, pausing now and then to examine something that caught their eye, but a sharp admonition from her and they rapidly lost interest. It took less than an hour to march them home, and as soon as she counted them, shepherded them into their heat lamp appointed and hot rocked rooms, she rested in her private room until feeding time.

She was embroidering a tunic for herself, the delicate needlework keeping her hands busy while she tried to plan her future. There wasn't much to do on Cadon. The Roci clan was nice enough, but it wasn't sufficient. Being born a slave had been a harsh sentence for her. Her life lay in the hands, or claws, of beings who could kill her in an instant, because she legally belonged to them. It wasn't

enough to wait to die. She needed to get herself together and run.

The knock on her door was unexpected. "Nanny Reva, the Matriarch requests your presence."

"Just a moment." She set aside her embroidery and straightened her tunic. A small mirror had been placed in her room for just such occasions and she quickly ran a brush through her ivory hair. She could remember it being red when she arrived years earlier, but the acid agent in the water on Calor had bleached her hair and skin of its pigment. When her hair was neat and her tunic straight, she opened the door and let one of the Matriarch's oldest children escort her to the breeding queen. It was a career option for the K'ket, they simply had to agree to be sterilized by their parent and they would receive the safety of the nest. Reva steered clear of the six ground limbs as they walked together to the grand receiving hall of the Matriarch. Apparently, there was a visitor.

As the doors opened for them, she noted the humanoid standing to one side of the Matriarch's throne. Reva approached and bowed formally. "Matriarch, you sent for me?"

The visitor was an Enjel, his midnight wings flared out behind him, matching the silken hair flowing from his forehead. His eyes were the same bright onyx as the K'ket, but his skin matched hers

in chalky appearance.

"Yes, Nanny Reva. This Enjel has come forward to purchase you."

"For what purpose, Matriarch?" The glare she gave the winged man should have given him the hint that she was not up for any fun and games.

"As a breeding partner. He says you have complimentary genetics with his kind and he has been seeking one such as you for some time." The enormous Matriarch clacked her front claws delicately. "I have agreed."

"Pardon, Matriarch?" She couldn't believe what she was hearing. "I thought I had served the Roci family well?"

"You have, Nanny, but it was a very large amount of money." The oversized insect cackled and her stinger came shooting forward to the spot where the Enjel had been standing.

He wasn't there any longer. He was behind Reva, winding his arms around her waist.

"You have received payment, Matriarch. Attempting to kill me was inhospitable."

"You are correct. I was just trying to see if I could keep both my Nanny and the money. She is quite talented, you know. I am sure you will be happy together." Retracting her tail from the floor, the Matriarch settled back on her hot rock. "Be gone, before I change my mind."

"Farewell, Matriarch. Lovely doing business

with you." The Enjel bowed formally and bent his legs.

It took all of Reva's self-control not to scream as he launched them into the air and took them out the window. With her talent for giving orders that had to be followed by all within earshot, she carefully did not follow her instinct to yell *let me down*. With the height at which they were flying, it would have been fatal.

She kept quiet. The rush of air past her face felt surprisingly soft, and at this height, she could not taste the insects that populated this world. It was refreshing. His wings beat steadily, keeping them aloft and transporting them to the spaceport on the far side of the city. A trip that took hours on foot, was accomplished in fifteen minutes.

When her new owner landed in the open-air spaceport, he placed her gently on her feet and took her hand in his own.

"Come with me, Reva. The faster we get off this planet, the safer you will be."

"What? What do you mean?" She didn't dig in her heels, but she wasn't following him with the enthusiasm he apparently wanted, so he swung her into his arms and carried her into the shuttle.

"Strap in and I will tell you. But I do warn you that your orders won't have quite the effect you anticipate, so I would avoid using them until we are off this world." He dropped her in the co-

pilot's seat and took his own seat in the specially made chair. It accommodated his wings nicely, but offered back support.

He ran through pre-flight checks in seconds.

Reva could only sit, bemused. This was not what she had experienced the last three times she had been sold. Those eager hands had caused her no end of stress. Her talent had bloomed by then and had kept her from their advances, but they felt a certain amount of uneasiness around her that had sent her back to the block. "Where are we going?"

He finished the checks, got clearance and lifted off before he answered. "We have been summoned to Sadril. They are evacuating due to a problem with their sun, and as members of the Sector Guard, we are going in to help with the evacuation."

That shocked her. She was the slave of the guard? "Sector Guard? You are a Guard?"

"We both are. The minute you crossed that threshold, Reva the slave ceased to exist. You are now a full citizen of the Alliance with the rights and freedoms included. Of course, if you try your position in the guard out and find it not to your liking, you can find employment elsewhere. We are always looking for support staff on Morganti." Most of his speech was said through clenched teeth as he fought the helm for control.

"Would you like some help with that? I am fully checked out on this style of shuttle." The offer came from the part of her that feared he would shake the ship apart.

"If you can help with the attitude, I would be most grateful." His teeth were still tight. He flipped a toggle to activate the co-pilot's controls.

Reva leaned forward to grip the controls as he relaxed. She smoothed their ascent and gently guided them out of the atmosphere. She brought them up and headed them to the slingshot point off the nearest moon, then turned to look at him.

His black eyes sparkled in the starlight. "That was well done, but I knew it would be."

She snorted in disbelief. "How could you have known I could fly?"

"Well, you can tell I can fly just by looking at me." He smiled at her surprised laughter. "Let me set the coordinates for our mission and then we can have some lunch and discuss how we came to be in this shuttle together." He competently entered their destination and set the computer for maximum speed. "Okay. That's taken care of that. Let's have a little talk now."

CHAPTER TWO

“So, Reva, you have been on the Alliance radar for some time.”

He led her back to the tiny common area and gestured for her to sit on one of the benches. The Enjel still hadn't told her his name, but he moved efficiently and soon she was sitting with a selection of small snacks designed for bi-pedal humanoids.

“Eat, they are safe enough for you.”

“Thank you. What's your name?”

“Thalik. Norelios Thalik. You may call me Nor.” He saluted her with a vegetable stick and smiled. “Enjel Seer of the Fornar colony.”

“Seer?” She munched and drank some of the tea he provided. It went down without any of the acidic burn she was used to. It had a rich and soothing taste that relaxed her with every sip.

“I have a certain amount of foresight when it comes to my own life. I have been seeing you as my partner in the Sector Guard for quite some

time." He shrugged, the black feathers moving with the motion. "Finding you was the hard part."

She swallowed through a suddenly dry throat. "You have been trying to find me?"

"Yes. Our Commander is a pattern Seer. He can see the way people and events connect. You and I were meant to be partners. As the other four teams paired up. They all have complimentary balances that make them very effective Guards."

"And you want to *pair up* with me?" Her outrage made him laugh.

"Eventually, yes. But until you choose to start that portion of our relationship, no. There is no rush here." He shrugged again. "Unless you want to jump me now and get it over with?"

Her snort was answer enough.

"Just thought I would make the offer." He smiled. "I have tracked you from the farm where you were born through every sale, wiping out all trace of you as I went. No document or file exists with your name or bio profile on it."

She put her plate aside. "So when you said that I was free now, you weren't just trying to get me to go along quietly?"

"Nope. Your talent depends on you being able to make noise, so I want you to make as much noise as you can." He collected her plate and placed it in the cleaner. "So. Is anything I have said remotely tempting?"

"The word freedom is still ricocheting around my mind." She smoothed her hands down her tunic. "What kind of a dress code is involved?"

"Ah. That is the fun thing." He flipped open one of the benches, revealing two folded suits. "This one is mine, and this one is yours. It will go nicely with your hair when the color comes back."

"You even know about that, huh?" Her hair was bleached to ivory when she was bought by the K'ket. Their acidic water had a bleaching effect on her hair and eyebrows. The suit he tossed her was a matching ivory, it had a stiff feel to the fabric. There were boots, but no undergarments.

"Yes. I was very thorough. The suit has insulating properties and has been treated to be a light armour. There is also a mask, if you wish it."

"What purpose does a mask serve?"

"To hide your identity from those we serve, so that they do not become attached, to give you some anonymity when you travel away from the Guard, and to keep any family members you have from becoming targets."

"The fellows of my birth file are not a concern. As far as I am aware, I am the only survivor of my breeding parent. As well as the only genetic combination between those two particular breeders." Reva looked around and after some investigation, found the small sanitary chamber. Getting the K'ket's servant tunic and leggings off

was extremely satisfying.

Pulling the new suit on felt right. There was a frame that would surround her face, which held her hair back, but it felt a little cumbersome. Tugging on the boots in the small space was a feat, but she had moved more in smaller quarters. Taking a deep breath, she slid open the door of the sanitary chamber. "How does it look?"

He wasn't wearing his suit. Nor wasn't wearing anything.

Fortunately, she knew just what to do. Ignore it. Right down to the portion of his anatomy that was happy to see her. "Nor? How does this uniform look? There aren't any mirrors large enough for me to check it out."

"It looks lovely. Perfect, and the framing surround makes you look like an ancient goddess from a coin. It houses some speakers and microphones to enhance your talent. If you would like to practice on me, I am willing." He held his hands out from his sides and gave her an innocent grin.

"Put some clothing on." Her order was an instinct and when he moved to tug on the smoke grey suit, she breathed a little easier. *"Don't forget your boots."* Five years as a Nanny was a hard habit to break.

His costume wrapped him in smoky armour from top to toe. Only his wings were left free and

unprotected. Even his hands were gloved. He was fully dressed and at attention with his wings half-furled. "Clothed enough?"

"Yes. Thank you. Time in slave pens does not endear one toward nudity."

He looked shocked, as if she had just crushed one of his favourite toys. "There goes my favourite pastime."

Reva sighed. "I know, I have run into Enjel's before. It is probably why the Matriarch agreed to sell me to one of your kind. They are well known for their dabbling in slavery. It wasn't too much of a jump to think you meant what you said about a breeding partner."

"That was the idea. It was why I selected that particular tact. She would never have surrendered you if it was to join the Sector Guard. K'ket are not known for their altruistic actions. It was far simpler to buy you."

She could see the logic. Dressed in this suit, she felt a certain stiffening of her spine, straightening of her shoulders, and a strange energy invading her. She wanted to help, and to run and jump as well as fight except she didn't know how to fight. "Can I get fight training?"

"As soon as we get back to Morganti. It is a little impractical in a shuttle."

"Alright. How long will we be in this shuttle?" She was never good at staying in one place for

long, not even in a shuttle, without something to do.

"Another three hours. We should be getting a pickup signal in a few minutes. A jump ship will pick us up and transport us to the solar system holding Sadril. We will be spending two days there for final evac and then return to home base on Morganti, where you will meet the rest of the team." He stretched and smoothed the fabric of his suit.

She bit her lip as she watched those strong hands move over his chest and hips. Oh. He was dangerous. Reva whirled and returned to the co-pilot's seat. "Alright. We are waiting for a signal. Let's go wait." She fidgeted her way through six minutes and then a signal began to flare through the com unit.

"This is the Alliance Warship Olical, please identify."

Nor took the com. "This is Shuttle Four of the Sector Guard, Seer and Order at the helm."

"Order? Don't I even get to pick?" Reva whispered with her hand on the mic.

Nor whispered back, "No. I have foreseen it and some things are not meant to change."

"You are cleared for bay nine. We jump in four minutes. Better hurry." The humour on the other end of the line was obvious and Nor immediately started to align with the ship. The bay doors

opened and they slipped inside.

Clamps locked them into position. "Sector Guard Shuttle Four in place, ready for jump."

The voice laughed. "Confirmed. Hang on to your panties, Guards."

It was all the warning they got as space folded around them and they were in two places at the same time for an instant. The inside of the bay was the same as it had been before the jump.

The chipper tone of the voice through the com made Reva smile.

"Welcome to Sadril space. Enjoy your evacuation. We will be running evacuees to a variety of systems. So hail me if you need me."

Nor laughed and hit the magnetic releases. "Thank you, Pilot. But just for the record..." he shifted the controls and they fell out of the belly of the warship as smoothly as they had entered. "Guards don't wear panties on duty."

Sniggering lit the com as their ship turned and headed to the planet's surface under his control.

As the warship glided off to pick up the small ships waiting at the rendezvous point, Nor turned to Reva. "We will need to meet with the ruling body controlling the evacuation. Are you ready for that?"

"I am still not sure what is going on, but I will come with you. What the heck, I have the uniform." She nodded.

"Excellent. I thought you might say that." His grin was infectious.

She smiled back and before she knew it, she was adjusting their trajectory through the atmosphere so that they would land at the evacuee centre.

"Oh. We aren't going to land. Far too many people would rush our shuttle. Set the shuttle to hover around the fifty foot mark."

Surprised, she followed his directions and set their conveyance to hover. "What now?"

"Now? We go and meet the director." Nor set the doors to open and affixed a remote to one of his broad shoulders. "How do you prefer to be carried?"

"Um. What is easiest for you?" After all, he was the one with the wings-- she was simply the passenger.

"This." He scooped her up so that she could drape one arm around his neck and hang on. One of his arms was under hers and around her ribs, the other was under her knees. "And off we go. Close your eyes if you need to."

Instead of closing her eyes, she widened them as he simply stepped out the door and then spread his wings as they cleared the shuttle. Heavy wing beats propelled them through the sky and with smooth grace, he brought them down inside a retaining fence outside a government building.

Seer nodded to the stunned guardsmen and set her on the ground. She walked next to him, head held high as they entered the doors.

Reva followed his lead as he strode through the halls as if he owned them. Enjels were naturally arrogant and he epitomized the race. A government official came out to meet them before they reached the large doors they were aiming for.

"You must be the representatives from the Sector Guard." The unctuous official reached for Nor's hand and he ignored it.

"I am Seer, this is Order. We have been assigned to assist your evacuation. What can we do to help?"

"I am Mish, Mayor of Ir, the capitol city of Sadril. We require you to move some of our more resistant citizens out of the restricted areas and onto evacuation shuttles." The nervous man waved a data pad at them.

Nor took it when she didn't.

"I see no more than a half dozen of the hold outs. What is making them stay?"

"They are geologists that claim the planet will adapt to the heat and we will all be able to live underground." He shook his head at the foolishness. "If you can convince them to leave their labs, it will be much appreciated."

"They are all located around the capitol, in the hills nearby. This shouldn't take too long." Nor

nodded briskly, looked over to Reva and jerked his head imperceptibly toward the door.

She took the hint and strode through the building and into the flaring daylight. Reva waited, and when Nor moved to scoop her up, she didn't fight him. She held onto the data pad as they ascended and kept her silence as the crowds screamed for help, with their panic turning them into a writhing mob. She had to stop it. *"Relax. Walk in an orderly manner, and help those who have fallen. You will all be evacuated. Don't worry."* She breathed in a deep sigh and looked up at her Enjel to see how he was doing so close to her talent. Nothing. In fact, he winked and flew into their opening shuttle hatch with silent accuracy.

When they were both back on their feet, he looked to her and showed her the headpiece on the side of his own uniform. It covered his ears. "I can hear you just fine if you speak in a normal tone, but as soon as you start using your talent, it shuts off my hearing until you stop speaking."

"That is very clever. How did you figure that out before you even met me?"

"I *saw* it. Years ago. For some reason, in my first imaginings, I could never hear you yell at me. It perplexed me, until I started to see you using your talent. Then it all made sense." He took the data pad and headed for the controls. "The first scientist that we need to retrieve is only ten

minutes away. We will head there first.”

She slid into the co-pilot’s seat and watched Nor manipulate both the data and their trajectory. “What does the data pad say?”

“It gives the locations of those refusing to be evacuated. Can’t you see it?”

“I can’t read Alliance Common. It is not something taught to slaves.” She tried not to feel defensive, she really did, but a tear came to her eyes at her failing.

“I am sorry. I didn’t know. I saw you and myself looking over a series of data pads, but didn’t know why. I will teach you the basics on our way back to Morganti. Don’t fret. We will get you all sorted out and up to speed with your education.” He took one hand off the steering bar and held her hand.

More tears filled her eyes. The last time someone had been nice to her, she had been in some unnamed slave pen the night before her sale and another female had given her a blanket to sleep under. That was the last kind moment she remembered.

Now she had one more for her collection.

CHAPTER THREE

“Staying here will only ensure your death. Pack only your essentials, and please, make your way to the departure station to prepare to evacuate the planet.” Reva took in a deep breath. The glazed eyes of the scientist had flared as he fought her control. She had won, but it was a close fight.

Seer had simply stood by and watched her work, an indulgent smile on his face. Just like he had for the first four scientists. Each of them had piled into private vehicles and headed for Ir after their *talk* with Order. They stayed on the property until he had loaded his essentials into his vehicle, then Seer carried her into the sky and back to the shuttle where they continued to monitor the progress of their projects.

Tucked back into the seats, Nor updated the data pad. “Excellent. Three have come in on their own and two were arrested. We need only get the last one and we can continue on to Morganti.”

“That’s great. I am exhausted. This takes a lot

out of me. It's like part of me is holding them until the need for control has been exhausted."

"I am sure that Commander will want to study your talent in detail. He is also our Medical officer." Nor smiled. "Only one more and we can go home. But be careful. There is a reason that they did not send the army for this one. He's tricky." He used the shuttle to get them to their next evacuee and locked the controls for hover. Again.

Reva just wanted to sleep. She had never used her talent this continuously. It was exhausting, but she stood, went to the shuttle door and waited.

"Just one more, Order. Then we can go to the base and you can rest." He lifted her slowly. Even he was getting tired after all the ups and downs.

"Promises, promises. I still haven't decided whether to join the guard or not."

"Fair enough. Hang on." He jumped out the shuttle door and spread his wings. They glided down in a slow spiral that let her see all the surrounding trees. Takeoff would be difficult, but not impossible, when it was time to leave.

The house they landed in front of had an adjoining lab, and it was from that angle that shots rang out. Nor dropped to the ground the instant the firing started and covered her. They were not injured, but Order's pristine uniform picked up some stains.

"Cease firing!" She was angry and it had always given her energy in the past. With Nor on top of her, she could only squirm a bit to indicate she wanted to rise. His lower body against her buttocks, signalled a different kind of rising. That hard ridge sent a bolt of panic through her. *"Get off me."* Reva scrambled to her feet when his weight lifted, and took a few steps away. "I think we should attend to the evacuee."

Seer was still on his knees, looking at her thoughtfully. "Indeed. Since you have kept him from killing us, you may as well take care of him. His name is Professor Nakalish."

She nodded and moved away in the uncomfortable silence that fell between them. The professor was standing in the doorway to the lab, his rifle still on his shoulder. Order took it from him gently and laid it out of his reach. "Professor Nakalish, we are here to make sure you evacuate. The planet's surface will be uninhabitable within months, and you need to leave, or you will die."

He blinked out of his trance. "They are exaggerating."

"They are not. I have seen the mutations of your sun for myself as we entered your system. The light is sickly and will not support life much longer. A few more months here will turn no tides in research and may cost you valuable time in setting up your lab on a new world." She used

reason, hoping that he would listen.

"You don't understand. My life, my work has all been about understanding this world, its moods and the forces that shape it." Tears formed in his eyes. "I cannot leave it."

"Can you leave probes? Monitoring equipment? I am sure that a relay satellite can be arranged to send you a signal wherever you end up. You can still continue your research, but you can compare a dying world to a living one." She really hoped that he would agree to it, but she saw the hesitation in his face.

"I cannot plant the monitors on my own, and my assistant has already gone off-world."

"I believe that Seer can help you. But you must not use your weapon on us again. Do you swear to leave peaceably when the probes are set?"

"I do so swear. How did you get me to stop firing by the way? I felt held against my will." He was frowning.

"The Sector Guard are not chosen for their looks." She smiled and turned to call for Seer, but he was standing behind her. "Well, some of them may be." He was really far too pretty to her eyes, and to know that his body responded to her, well, *that* took her mind down other paths. "Seer, the professor--"

"Has agreed to leave provided that I assist him in planting his probes. It will be done." Seer

noded to her and then to the professor. "Show me what must be done."

It took hours, and, though exhausted, Order kept a steady stream of tea and snacks coming from the professor's stores. Food was essential to keeping a keen mind. The men discussed coordinates, trajectories, and a number of phrases that slipped her mind. It was times like this that her lack of education frustrated her.

She could operate a shuttle because she had been trained to by rote, but she didn't know why the ship responded, the mechanics of the situation and equipment. Her ignorance was an irritation, but with the help of the Guard, it just might be remedied. When a grimy, but cheerful, Seer looked over at her, she smiled back.

"We are almost ready, Order. Just have to set the last few to burrow at the appropriate intervals and we will be good to go."

It was Nor's face full of relief at the end of their assignment that she saw the instant before the professor fired the gun. Seer fell heavily to the ground and Reva was left facing the barrel. "You promised, Professor! You said you would leave if your probes were left behind. You didn't have to shoot Seer because of it." She edged toward the door, trying to see if Nor was all right.

The professor began to move toward her. "I lied. My work here is too important, and now, thanks to Seer, I will be able to complete my measurements as the planet surface changes. It was too bad that I had to shoot him, but he would not have let me stay here." The professor was advancing with the gun.

Reva was taking in a breath to run when the professor fell to the ground.

Seer was up and looking pissed at the bloody crease in his shoulder.

"Let me guess, you knew he would strike."

"Yes, I just didn't know when until I saw you standing there with the grass stains on your suit. It had to be then." Seer came forward and hugged her lightly. "Are you all right?"

"Fine. But I would step back if I were you." She smiled through tight lips. "I am fighting the excruciating urge to kick you in the balls."

He stepped back.

"So what do we do with the professor?"

"Oh, he is getting delivered and you and he are going to have quite the conversation on the way to Ir."

Her smile was still showing a lot of teeth. "Let's get him in there. Fly up and bring the shuttle down. I will wait with the treacherous one."

He looked a little hesitant, but left them to fly back to the shuttle. He would have to land it

nearby as the woods were a little heavy.

The instant that Seer cleared the door, Order scuttled to the professor's side and started talking, *"You will never pick up a weapon in anger again. If defence is required, you may use it as a cudgel, but not a firearm. You will always give the Sector Guard the deference that they are due. When they are mentioned, you will sing their praises. After Seer returns, you will walk with us quickly and quietly to the shuttle and leave your home world for another, without complaint or argument. Upon reaching your new world, you will start over, with a love for the new planet you call home. You will find contentment, and never raise your hand in anger again."*

The professor struggled and rolled over, groaning and rubbing his head. "Where is Seer?"

Her head ached tremendously. "After you shot him? Getting the shuttle. You are coming with us."

"Yes, of course I am. I will just grab some data packs and we can be on our way." The professor was good to his word, this time. He piled a few data chips into a storage unit and turned to face her.

The thrum of the shuttle was close. Reva looked out the lab door and could just make it out through the trees. "Come along, Professor. Your ride is here."

It had been such a simple command, but he followed it as if lashed. They walked in silence

toward the shuttle.

Seer met them halfway. He caught their mood and simply led them to the shuttle and helped the professor take a seat.

Silently, Order took the co-pilot's seat and lashed herself in.

He took off and in less than an hour, they were hovering over Ir. "I will take care of our passenger. See you in a minute."

He left her alone in the shuttle, and she smiled as she used the monitors to watch him spiral to the ground with his passenger. The professor neatly lined up with others to be shown to his assigned evacuation shuttle. He was terribly polite and very quiet.

When Seer came back to the shuttle, he flew past the front viewer so that she could get a good look at him.

His wings held a steady beat as he grinned at her. Each of the muscles of his broad torso was highlighted by the fit of his uniform. It was an excellent fit. He only showed off for a few minutes before returning to the inside of the shuttle. "The professor is all checked in and ready to leave with the others. We have completed our little trip. We can go home now."

"I don't have a home." Her voice was so soft she almost didn't hear her own words.

Nor looked over and took her hand in his. "You

will. Just let it come."

"You have seen it?"

"That I have." He winked. "Now, since you are so adept at atmospheric flying, you may take us up to the outer jump station. We are hitching a ride."

CHAPTER FOUR

Reva was bemused. Another shuttle was waiting for them at the coordinates Nor had given her. It was slightly larger than the one they were in, but the same manufacturer.

"Pilot, is that you?"

"It certainly is. You won't believe what Fixer has come up with. Dock with me, then get in here for the jump." The female voice paused, "Sorry. Where are my manners? Hello, Order. I am Pilot, your chauffeur for today. Please come aboard the Class One."

Nor took the controls from her and worked to line them up with the larger shuttle. The light collision was barely noticeable. They were under the belly of the other shuttle. A few flicks of his fingers and a ladder descended from the roof of the shuttle. "Go on up. The lights are on for a solid seal."

"This is a little odd. I didn't even know there was an upper hatch here." Reva stood looking up

for a moment, then started to climb.

"These shuttles have a number of exits. Being trapped in a sinking shuttle is one of my nightmares."

Nor's completely frank tone belied the heat in his eyes when she caught him staring at her buttocks in the tight white uniform. She simply sighed and kept climbing. A release handle was at the top of the ladder and, holding her breath, she pulled it. A feminine hand reached down and pulled her through the hatch.

The woman had similar features to her own, but small ports installed on her wrists, neck and temples. "Hello, Reva. Welcome to the Class One. I am Helen, the Pilot." Since their hands were still joined, she shook Reva's, smiling all the while.

"Reva, I guess I am Order. Thank you for your welcome." She brushed at the stains on her uniform, self-conscious at meeting another female while wearing dirty clothing. She stepped aside as Nor came through the hatch and sealed the hatch of their shuttle behind them.

He locked down the inner hatch of the Class One and smiled at the two ladies. "Shall we get going?"

Helen looked at his nicked arm and shook her head. "Okay, but you may want to strap in. Reva, you can be in the co-pilot's seat because, frankly, Norelios can't sit in it properly during jump."

Reva could see that his wings would be a little awkward in the standard seat. "Why did we have to come on board? Nor would have been much more comfortable in his shuttle."

Helen looked back at her, she was already hooking into her shuttle via a series of jacks. "Oh. Well, Fixer has rigged up a piggy back mechanism, but we aren't sure if it will hold during a jump."

"So you might drop the other shuttle while folding space?"

"Yes. This one is safe, but I can't vouch for the other shuttle. This is kind of an experiment." Helen shrugged. "We have been having a lot of those lately. Fixer is one heck of an inventor. A little scary, but extremely creative. Each of us has a uniform that she has worked to our particular needs."

Reva tried to look encouraging, but brushed at more of her grass stains. "I just wish she had made it a little more stain resistant."

"Well, you are wearing a prototype. She'll make the adjustments you want in the next one." Helen smiled. "Norelios, are you ready to jump?"

Reva looked back at Nor. He was wrapping straps around his wrists as he stood between walls. "You can go through a jump like that?"

"It beats the alternative. Banging my wings isn't fun." He gave a few experimental tugs. "All set."

"Okay. First we deploy the membrane that will bind the two shuttles."

She closed her eyes and there was a mechanical hissing.

"Alrighty, brace for jump." Helen didn't even move. The ship simply moved from one point in space to another, within the span of less than a second.

As always, when they came out of jump, Reva's head swam a little. She glanced back to see that Nor was in rougher shape, his skin chalky and his head hanging down. She unbuckled her harness and went to see if he was conscious. "Nor? Are you all right?" Reva stroked the hair from his face and raised his jaw.

He looked at her blearily. "Yes. Rough jump though." He shook his head and looked to his wrists. "Can you help me here?"

"Of course." She put her much smaller hands up against his rough ones and pried the ties from his grip, then engaged in unwrapping his wrists. She had to rise on tiptoes to untie him, and ended up leaning on him for support. As soon as his first arm was free, she went to work on the second. Their bodies touched from thigh to chest as she blushed and hurried to work the wrapping loose. "Just hold still. There. All free." Trembling with something that terrified her to her toes, she stepped back and away from him.

"Thank you. My hands were getting numb." He rubbed them together and smiled softly to her.

"Take your seat in the back, Norelios, or kneel, but we are heading into atmosphere and its going to get a little rough," Helen called.

Reva looked around wildly. "Landing? So soon? Are we at Morganti?" Her questions tumbled out one after the other. "How are you going to land with the shuttle under you?"

Helen's eyes went wide. "Oh, shit. I forgot about that." The com light lit up and Helen barked, "Fixer! How do I land with this thing on?"

They were entering the atmosphere and Reva was thrown against Nor.

"Best take your seat, Reva. Something tells me that we are going to have to ditch my shuttle to land."

His voice sounded in her ear and the warmth that had spilled through her when she untied him came roaring back. Muttering an apology, she pushed away from his chest and made her way to the co-pilot's seat.

An unfamiliar voice was answering Helen. "You were supposed to drop the membrane in orbit and get Nor back in control of the shuttle. As it is, you might need to come in for a hover and ditch shuttle four from low altitude."

Helen sighed. "That I can do, as long as the weight doesn't throw me off. Wish me luck and

see you in ten, either to shake your hand or kick your ass."

A snigger came through the com before it cut off.

"That woman is quite the smartass." Helen laughed and brought the ship into the lower atmosphere.

"She's one of the Sector Guard?"

"Yes. Partnered with Shade. He's a Selna."

A large expanse of land sped by beneath them. Helen slowed the shuttle until it was moving at a much more reasonable pace. "That's the base. That blob over there on the left."

The ship slowly moved toward it and before Reva knew it, they were hovering over the shuttle bays near the base.

"Are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there yet?" came from the back of the shuttle.

Helen smiled. "Quiet, you, or I am turning this thing around and going back into jump." She lowered the shuttle a few feet and gently disengaged the membrane that held them to shuttle four. Seconds later, she landed the Class One.

Sighing with relief, Helen unplugged her body from the shuttle. "Okay. Everyone is alive and the ships aren't un-repairable. I call it a success." A giggle broke from her lips as she finished her declaration, ruining the effect. "I love coming

home. It's like leaving in reverse. Reva, welcome to Morganti."

Holding to honesty, she took a deep breath, "Thank you, but I don't know if I want to stay."

Helen looked a little confused as she caught Nor's gaze.

He simply smiled and said, "I am working on it." He held out his hand.

Reva took it, letting him lead her into the air of a new world.

CHAPTER FIVE

They left Helen and Fixer arguing about the practical applications of the jump membrane. The ladies were still going strong with their *discussion*.

"This is new, they were just digging for the pool when I left. Enjel's don't swim very well." Nor was almost scampering like a puppy, but Reva was exhausted.

The pool did look inviting, and perhaps after a nap she would take advantage of it. "I am sure that they don't. The wings would probably be a bit of detriment to your swimming ability."

"They don't like getting wet." He shook his head. "One of the down sides to feathers." He laughed at his own joke.

She smiled weakly. "Is there somewhere I can lie down and take a nap?" Her head was spinning.

"Our first stop is Medical. Helen's mate is our Commander and Medical officer, Hyder Mihal." He led her to the door that read MEDICAL and

escorted her inside.

She had just laid back on the examining table when an Azon came through the door.

“Reva. So nice to meet you at long last. We have longed to have someone with your talents on board. Most of the talents we have are environmental and not confrontational.”

She nodded at him drowsily. “Do you mind if I sleep through most of the exam?”

“No. That will be fine. I will wake you when I am done.” He shared a look with Nor, but the smile he got in return was enough confirmation of her odd behaviour.

* * * *

Reva was out like a light. Her light snores made him smile. “Not what you expected, is she?” Nor was relieved that he had gotten her back to Morganti. It had been a gray area in his mind for some time.

“No. I expected someone with more presence, and a louder voice.” Hyder smiled as he put the scanners into action.

The equipment around the base was all getting remarkable upgrades, thanks to Fixer, but even Mala could not repair what was wrong with Reva. Nor despaired over her getting her self-esteem into working order, because only when she was

confident to come to him under her own power, would they become partners in life, as well as in the Guard.

"Did you know about the scar tissue?" Hyder's voice was quiet and Reva's even breathing didn't change.

"I suspected. She was sold to a member of the Moreski royal family when she was a young woman. He only kept her for a few months, but he is the likely suspect for the damage. He was known for his...unusual tastes."

"It is extensive, it goes from her shoulders almost to her knees." He shook his head in frustration. "I can reduce it, but not entirely. Some of the marks have gone to the bone."

Nor nodded grimly. If he hadn't already taken care of the Moreski in question, he would have been inconsolable. "When she is awake, I will ask her. What generates her talent?" Distracting Hyder wasn't easy, but talk of talents usually did it.

He checked his little handheld readout. "She appears to have multiple layers of vocal chords. In her case, literal chords. They must vibrate to reach the primal brain of whomever she is giving the Order."

"Interesting. She certainly does affect the primal brain. When she was giving the orders to the evacuees, they snapped into attention as if her

words were oxygen." Nor moved closer to Reva and relaxed as he watched her deep breathing. With her past, the willingness to sleep in a public place showed tremendous trust, or it showed that she just didn't care anymore. He really hoped it was the former.

"Is she going to have a problem with Mala?"

Nor hesitated. "I have no idea." Mala was a Moreski royal bastard, but had the distinctive rainbow hair of her father's family.

"Well, we will deal with it if it becomes an issue." Hyder shrugged. "I would like you to wake her, she needs some inoculations and I don't want to give them to her while she is asleep. It isn't sportsmanlike."

As Hyder prepared the shot, Nor approached his sleeping companion. "Reva. Wake up." He was not expecting her to bolt upright and stand next to the exam table.

"Yes? What did you need?" She flipped her hair behind her back and looked at him expectantly.

"Oh. Nothing. Hyder is going to give you some inoculations. He didn't want to jab you while you slept."

Reva smiled at the surprised Azon, he had jumped back a foot when she launched off the table.

Nor watched carefully as Hyder recovered and stepped forward with the injector.

"Can you expose your shoulder? It will absorb into your system more easily with direct skin contact."

When she opened the front of her suit, Nor had to admit his attention was riveted. The smooth expanse of flesh made his mouth water, and when she peeled the ivory suit off her shoulder, his wings trembled in response.

Hyder was unmoved. He swiped a swab across her shoulder and pressed the injector.

"Ow."

"Sorry about that, but now you are cleared for the variety of species here on Morganti."

She shrugged back into her uniform and closed the tantalizing glimpse of skin. "Wonderful. You have no idea how happy that makes me." She yawned. "Now. Where can I really get some sleep?"

Nor moved to take her hand. "I will show you to our quarters." At her narrow eyed look, he quickly filled in. "The Guard's rooms are off a central hub."

"Then let's go before I pass out." She looked up at him and curled her fingers around his. "I need to get some rest before I can deal with any more of this." She raised her lavender gaze and smiled tiredly.

"Done and done. Hyder, any further tests can wait until tomorrow. See you then." Nor nodded

briskly to his Commander and escorted his partner down the hall and to the Guards' private quarters.

Her rooms were next to his and that fact was burning in his mind as he watched her close the door between them. If she didn't come to him soon, his life was going to be hell.

* * * *

The scream froze in her throat as Reva sat up in the unfamiliar bed. Her heart was pounding and her hands shook as she tried to throw off the remnant of the nightmare. The door that connected her to Norelios was firmly shut and she wanted it to stay that way. Maybe if she could work off the stress, she could rest. An image of the pool flickered through her thoughts, so she slithered back into her uniform and padded barefoot to the area that was in her memory.

The water surged invitingly as the light of the three moons danced across it. With no swimming apparel, she simply skinned out of her uniform and jumped into the water. At first the shock of the water locked her muscles, but soon she was tooling back and forth with an even stroke.

It was freeing to be able to swim as much as she wanted without worrying about being summoned for duty to the Matriarch. Her muscles had a

pleasant numbness that she had missed and she was on her way out of the pool when she realized she was not alone.

Dawn was visible on the horizon and the two females were silhouetted in its light.

"Come on out, Reva. We have towels and clothes for you," Helen called.

The other woman was holding the promised towel and approached her slowly. "Hello, Reva. Good morning. I am Mala, but you may have heard of me as Fixer."

The woman's tone was low and friendly, so Reva allowed her to wrap her in the enormous sheet. Shivering now that she was out of the water, she tried to get a better look at Mala. The woman was still backlit by the light, but a chill went through her when she saw the rainbow hair. "Moreski?" The panic in her voice was unmistakable and her back tightened before she could calm herself.

"Only half, raised in exile because my father chose love over bloodlines. He died years ago." Mala seemed to be expecting the fear.

"You read my file."

"Yes. Commander thought I might need to know about it in case you had a permanent aversion to my father's race." She stepped back and let Reva take a long hard look at her.

Mala wasn't imposing, as the prince who

tortured her had been, but she still bore the unmistakable genetic stamp of royal Moreski blood. Her eyes were kind, and her mouth had the look of someone who smiled often. A bright intelligence burned in her and it was obvious for anyone who wanted to look for it. There was also no pity or judgement in her gaze, no contempt for a slave, or derision for one beneath her. "I will withhold judgement until we have a discussion about my suit. Really, white?" She snorted and instantly the two women laughed cautiously.

"Well, I am here to make amends. I have some clothing for you to shop in, and we are heading into town as soon as you get something to eat."

Mala handed Reva the clothing, then turned her back to give her a semblance of privacy. Helen followed suit. Grimacing as she pulled the undergarments over damp skin, Reva dressed as quickly as she was able. "Ready, but I need shoes."

Helen answered her, "There are boots by the door."

A few quick stomps and she was ready for action. They walked beside her to the commissary and it puzzled Reva as to why the staff looked at Mala with trepidation. They had loaded their trays and were sitting down when she felt confident enough to ask the question, "Why are they looking at you like you are going to eat the whole

selection?"

Helen laughed and dug into her fruit salad as Mala turned a delicate pink. "Because she has. The side effect of her talent for manufacture is that she has to replace the body mass she uses with food. She has forced the catering staff to put in more overtime than any selection of dignitaries combined."

Mala sighed. "It isn't as bad as that."

"Yes it is." Helen was still chortling.

Reva dug into her breakfast and tried to think of another way to phrase her question. Finally, she blurted out, "How am I supposed to get clothing? I have no money, no credits, no possessions even. All that I own is my skin, and in some areas, people would swear that Nor owns it."

Cursing lightly, Mala dug in her jumpsuit for a credit band. "Sorry. I meant to hand this over when we were shopping and I didn't think about you needing it before. It has your first annual salary on it, plus a signing bonus. Your retinal scan will work for identification."

Reva took the band and slipped it over her wrist. She now had her own money to do with as she pleased. "Can I get my hair done?"

Helen leaned forward eagerly. "Of course. What do you want, a cut, style?"

"First, I want my hair and eyebrow color back, then we can discuss what to do with the rest."

"Oh. I thought that was your color. What is it normally?"

"Before the K'ket acid showers, it was a nice blood red, I think. It was so long ago." Wistfully, she watched the staff go about their morning routine. More people were entering the commissary, including Nor and a male Selna. "A male Selna?"

"Yes, my partner and mate, Isabi." Mala waved the men over and Nor came forward with a relieved smile.

Isabi didn't walk so much as glide toward them, the unrelieved black of his velvet skin covered by what seemed to be a standard casual wear jumpsuit. "And you must be Reva, the newest recruit to our happy band." He bent low over her hand and pressed his smooth lips to her knuckle.

Nor looked less than pleased.

"I am pleased to meet you, Isabi." She simply didn't react to the touch. It wasn't at all the way she felt when Norelios touched her. No heat, just the warmth of a heartfelt greeting. The thundercloud of expression on Nor's face told her something she needed to know--he didn't like the Selna touching her, but he was not going to speak for her. It was nice. He trusted her to make her own decisions. "Your mate has been kind enough to offer to take me shopping with Helen. We will

be leaving after we finish.”

“Then Nor and myself had best get our food together so that we may enjoy your company for even a fleeting moment.” Isabi was turning on the charm and his wife was looking at him as though amazed. As soon as the men left the table, the ladies started whispering.

“I think Isabi is trying to get Nor to court you. Do you think it’s working?” Mala hissed to the other ladies.

“I have never seen him turn on the charm like that, Mala, you are a lucky girl.” Helen smirked a little. “If Hyder had pulled something like that, I would have punched him. You also have a lot of self-control there, Fixer.”

“It is more of a trust issue. I can’t afford *not* to trust my partner, so I know that he is just trying to force Nor’s hand. But you have to remember that the Enjel have a formal courtship process.”

“Right. With the coloured gifts that he has to give. How weird is that?”

“What you two are saying isn’t making any sense, shh. They are coming back.”

As the men took their places, Isabi next to Mala and Nor next to Reva. She thought long and hard about what she had learned from those few sentences. Did she want to be courted? Where could she find the rules? Nor’s thigh along hers was warm, almost hot, as he pressed himself

against her. She was glad they had chosen the bench seating, as his wings would not have been comfortable in the chairs.

"Did you sleep well?"

His voice surprised her out of her thoughts of his wings. "I slept until I woke, as is my custom. I am used to getting by on limited sleep." She felt she had to add the last because he looked at her sharply.

"I thought I heard you cry out."

She blushed. "You may have. I stubbed my toe getting out of that bed."

He seemed satisfied with that, and not the least bit suspicious that Reva had screamed herself awake, as she had so often in the past. The K'ket did not mind once they moved her to a far wing of the nesting house, but her previous owner had been appalled by both the damage done to her body and her mind.

She sipped her tea and looked over to her soon-to-be companions. They were both finished eating, and the men had slipped into a discussion of formal practices for battle and religion. It was time to go.

"Shall we, ladies? I am excited. I have never shopped for myself before." She put an enthusiastic smile on her face and stood. Helen and Mala followed suit. "To the hairdresser!"

Giggling like schoolgirls, they nodded to their

counterparts and left the base for the small town nearby. Reva was determined to have as much fun as she possibly could with these women.

It may be her first and last time shopping.

CHAPTER SIX

“**T**hat colour analysis was fun. I don’t remember it being this dark though.” Reva combed through her restored red locks with fascination. The stylist had repaired her hair as well as restored it. The deep blood red hair now matched her eyebrows and to the other Guards’ amusement, her private areas.

“It looks lovely, and very striking against your eyes. I have never seen eyes that particular shade of purple before. What species are you?” Helen was idly curious as they headed to the next stop on their journey. Clothing and footwear.

“I have no idea. Hyder was running the analysis, so I am hoping he will be able to tell me.” She shrugged and let herself be dragged into a shop that had both gowns and casual clothing.

“Welcome to Zalbeeliyah’s, nice to see you again, ladies.”

The proprietor was a l’nal and so Reva nodded cautiously. “Hello. I believe I need to be outfitted

from the skin outward."

The upper four appendages rubbed together greedily. "With your coloring, my dear, I feel a challenge coming on."

"Zabby, go easy on her. She's just learning her fashion sense." Mala sat back on one of the stools designed for visitors and prepared to watch a show.

The spider scuttled toward her, then rose up on its hind legs. "Just hold still now while I scan your sizes in." A few swift motions and the creature went to the back room, only to return with a mind numbing collection of fabrics. "Well, now. Up you go, onto the fitting platform."

A little bemused, Reva allowed herself to be bullied into the centre of the showroom. "Nothing with an open back. I have some scar damage that may be a little offensive to some."

"Pity. You would look striking in something that revealed as much of that tasty skin as possible." Zabby clicked her mandibles in a laugh and the other ladies shared Reva's uncertain look.

"Is there something here that I can wear today? I really don't have any clothing with me." Reva kept her gaze forward as the seamstress held colours against her and created two piles--disgusting and acceptable.

"Mala, are you making notes? No sissy whites or ecru. I have to deal with people at close range

in riot situations. Angry people throw things that stain." Reva was thinking of her next assignment without even realizing that she was accepting her role as one of the Guard.

Mala laughed and winked at Helen. "Noted. I was also going to improve the armour on your suit, since you will be arriving unarmed for the most part."

A deep silver tunic with leggings was produced, with a matching belt. It was gorgeous and would highlight every portion of her body while leaving her free to move. "I love it. Can I try it on?"

"Of course. The changing rooms are to your right. Come back out so I can make any adjustments that are needed."

Scuttling off with her arms full of fabric, she eagerly stripped off the borrowed jumpsuit. The tights fit like a dream, and the tunic was a little shapeless until she fit the finely wrought belt around it. The brighter silver shone against the darker, and when she flipped her hair out and looked at her reflection in the mirror, a little bit of pride filled her soul. She put the borrowed boots back on and strode out to face her judges.

The silence that greeted her made her heart sink, until the applause started. "Wow. Fantastic. You look great!"

Even the seamstress was struck by her

appearance. "Perfect fit. As if it was made for you."

"Now, Zabby is going to get on the casual and formal wear, and you are going to get some shoes."

"Indeed. Did you wish to pay for all of your clothing now, or when it is picked up?"

"Now, please. And can it be delivered to the base? I don't know when my next assignment will be."

"Certainly." The spider rapidly ran up the tally.

With a shaking hand, Reva extended the credit band.

"Excellent. Lovely doing business with you. I will make your new wardrobe my first priority."

"Thank you." She wore her new clothing with pride. "Where to next, ladies?"

They spoke as one, "Tal's," then burst into giggles.

"Tal's it is. Lead the way."

In the shoe shop, she selected sandals, two pairs of boots, some slippers and had her measurements taken for some additional boots to match her uniform, when Mala got the new one done. Reva wore the sandals right away, they were strappy, black and suited her outfit.

She paid for her purchases and the ladies dragged her off to one more stop, the best local restaurant in town. It was only when they sat and

menus were placed before them, that Reva had to admit her failing. When her two companions asked her what she wanted to have, she looked at them and said honestly, "I can't read."

Helen whispered, "Seriously?"

"It isn't a joke."

Mala smoothed it over as the server came to take their order. "Kevak, and a pitcher of juice and sweet tea."

The server nodded and swept their menus away.

Reva leaned forward. "What did you just order?"

Mala smiled and took her hand lightly, a friendly squeeze before releasing it. "Oh. Kevak is a selection of small dishes on the menu. On Helen's world, it is called Tapas. The food is served in small servings, like a tasting menu, so you can pick out ones you like, and we will explain what they are and what they are called. New worlds mean new food. I used to live on a space station, so the variety available is twice as good here."

"Really, a station? Where?"

"It was Kaddaka station. I left working in the docks to join the Guard."

"Huh. I thought all of the Moreski were wealthy and spoiled."

"Oh. My father wouldn't stand for that. He

worked and supported us, and when he died, I took over my mother's upkeep. She had never been alone, so it was hard on her when I left to find employment. Now she has her social circle to keep her occupied so that she doesn't need to break things as often."

Reva laughed in confusion. "What do you mean by that?"

Mala tugged her ear and leaned to the side as the pitchers of tea and juice were brought to them. "Oh. She used to think that I would only talk to her if she needed me to fix something. So she took to bashing her appliances and pulling wiring. Unfortunately for her, I knew that kitchen so well that I could repair any appliance no matter how far away I was. She had to settle for annual physical visits."

"So you see your parent?"

"As often as I can."

"And what of you, Helen? Do you see your parent?"

Helen's face clouded over. "No. When the Terran volunteers left Earth, we agreed never to return to our home world." She held up a hand to expose the jacks in her wrists. "I no longer meet my species specs. I couldn't go home even if I wanted to."

"That's harsh." Reva would have added more, but the food arrived and all the women fell silent

as the server explained each dish and its ingredients. She started with the simple and easily identifiable, then went for the exotic. A few times, the ladies collided over the last of one of the tidbits, but it ended in laughter. Mala picked up the bill when Helen snarked about it, and Reva stayed out of, what seemed to be, a long-standing argument.

"Geez, woman, you are so cheap, it amazes me. All this money spent on nothing. You could have purchased a small retirement moon somewhere by now."

"I prefer to live a thrifty life. That way I won't go without." Helen had a prim look to her.

Reva just blinked. She added to the conversation. "I have not had money before, but it makes sense to spend wisely. Food with friends is a good investment, not only in the food, but in the goodwill it engenders."

"Excellently put. Now. We are going to take you back to the Guard base before Karaoke night starts up. Helen introduced it to Morganti and the locals just love it. My ears do not."

She agreed and soon the ladies and their shopping bags were on their way back to the base, "What is Karaoke?"

Helen looked astonished and then launched into a fevered explanation of her favourite pastime. She explained the music selection and the

words scrolling on the screen.

“Oh. That may have to wait until I learn to read Common.” Reva shrugged and smiled. She didn’t want to leave the afternoon on a sour note.

Helen flushed in embarrassment. “Sorry. I forgot that--”

“I can’t read, yet. No problem. I will.” Reva smiled at the Pilot. “This Karaoke will give me incentive.”

They talked about inconsequential things on the way back, including the Draï couple who made up yet another pair of Guards, as well as the Dhemon and his wife. The Draï had a home off the base and they spent all their time therewhen they weren’t on assignment. Livin and Vasu were reportedly very nice.

When they were pulling into the parking area at the base, Reva had a chilling thought, *what if Nor doesn’t like my new look?*

CHAPTER SEVEN

“So. What do you think?” Reva spun on her toes and twirled in front of Norelios. The surprise in his eyes was more frightening than gratifying. “You don’t like it?”

As suddenly as the surprise had risen, a dark heat took its place. “I love it. On Jela, red hair is prized.”

“Oh. Thank you.” Her blush rose easily in her cheeks. He had been sitting and watching a vid in the common room when she burst in. “I won’t disturb you anymore.”

He reached out and caught her wrist. “You weren’t disturbing me. I am glad you are pleased. Come and sit, I think you will find this vid fascinating.” He pulled her into his lap and settled her against him.

The silk of her new tunic warmed quickly against him, and she took a deep breath, revelling in his scent. Cookies and spice, everything she had loved when she was working in a kitchen as a

child. The video was about Enjel mating practices, and the formality of the system was ironic for a species that was renowned for its sex drive.

All unmarried women on Jela were assigned to live in an Aerie. The men sent them gifts and the colour of the wrapping determined the intent of the sender. The women chose from the gifts and their colourations for their companion for the evening, then they met them for the agreed upon event. White was a casual afternoon, green an apology, blue was a romantic evening at the Aerie with dinner and dancing, and red was an overnight stay at the male's home. Black was reserved for final commitment, the Leap of Faith, as it was called. The female, if she was Enjel, had her wings tied and dressed in a formal gown. At the appointed time, she leapt off the edge of a very high cliff. Her male's duty was to sweep in and catch her, thus binding them forever.

"That's lovely. What happens if he doesn't catch her?" She was cradled in his arms like a kitten, her legs folded along one of his thighs and her buttocks perched on the other.

"Then she dies and he is sent to the priesthood, never to be allowed near a female again." His voice was a soft rumble.

She rubbed her chin against his chest. Thoughts she shouldn't be entertaining came rushing to the fore. She sat up and looked him in the eye. "Kiss

me."

Nor's eyes widened, but interest flared as he held the back of her neck with one hand and lifted her up to him with the other. The kiss started as a chaste brushing of lips, but when Reva sighed happily, he deepened it. She tasted him and her mind spun with lust. He tasted perfect. When he pulled back, she whimpered and clutched at his hands.

"You ordered me to kiss you, but I won't do anything else that you wish if you don't tell me to do it."

She blinked owlishly. "So if I want you to touch me, I have to order you to do it? Don't you want me?" Her voice was plaintive to her own ears.

He sighed, ruffling her scarlet hair. "No, not order, simply tell me. You have had enough options taken from you in your life. Taking a lover should be your choice."

Reva sat back on the edge of his lap and thought about it. She wanted him, his touch, his companionship, wanted to feel his skin under her palms and know she could stop him at anytime. That kind of power was heady. She wanted it. "Norelios, make love to me."

"Your command is my wish." He held her firmly and rose to his feet. They left the common room and Nor's door opened at his approach. Inside the room, he quickly divested himself of his

clothing. Naked in seconds, as only a man in heat could do. Nor let her look her fill, turning slowly and flaring his wings while flexing his buttocks.

“Very nice, but I seem overdressed.”

He took her clothing off with much less speed. Stroking the curves and textures of her skin with deliberate intent. She purposely didn’t let him touch her back.

“Sweet, I know about the scars. They don’t bother me, aside from the pain they caused you.” His fingers massaged her shoulders, then moved slowly toward her back.

She stiffened, but didn’t stop him. She knew what he was feeling, the ridges and scars left by her sojourn with her Moreski master. They were stiff and made it hard to move in damp weather, but otherwise didn’t bother her too much.

His face tightened, the already harsh planes focused on the information his hands were giving him.

Reva was afraid to look down, for fear his desire for her had faded with the reality of her body’s damage. His hands came to rest on her hips and pulled her firmly against him. No, his interest had not been damaged, in fact, it was quite heated.

“I want you, Reva, just the way you come. Scars, attitude and big mouth all in one.” He chuckled against the top of her head. “I have a

present for you before we go any further.”

She looked at her own naked form and his, then blinked. “Are you sure that you want to stop for a gift giving right now? I was kind of in the mood for something else.”

Nor laughed and reached into one of the drawers near his desk. A small bundle wrapped in red emerged. “I don’t know if you were paying attention during the vid, but this is a request for a day in my home, with me.”

Her hands trembled as she took the parcel. “What is in it?” She had never gotten a gift before.

“That is why you open it, to find out.” He seemed eager to watch her.

She climbed up onto his bed and knelt with the parcel in front of her. She pulled the fabric away from the box and looked up to see him nodding at her. “Well, I have accepted the wrapping, so that is a yes.” She carefully opened the box and found a set of bracelets inside. A deep silver with black accents, they fit her wrists perfectly. “Thank you. They are lovely. I accept them gratefully.”

It was the last sentence she would utter for a while as he took over the invitation she had offered to him, and used it to make love to her for the first time.

No part of her escaped his touch, the graze of his fingertips and the stroke of his lips. Her body was humming with the need to be filled, and

when he obliged, she hung on to him as if he was the last man in the universe. She bit her lip as her climax hit her, afraid that she would tell him to stop. Her body rocked against his, and when he shouted his triumph in his own release, she smiled tiredly.

This voluntary sex was fun. She was definitely going to try it more often.

She was on her back and Nor was on his belly, one wing covering her completely. She was toasty warm. Not a horrible way to spend her first open day as a free woman. She could see why the Enjel got their reputation as lovers. He had been most thorough, and each part of her body still tingled. "Nor? I appreciate this, more than you can know."

"Oh. I think I am the one who has to issue thanks. I have never before made love to the perfect woman." He lifted his head, then brought one of her hands to his lips. "It is an experience I wish to repeat. As often as possible." He waggled his brows.

She laughed.

He propped himself up on his elbows. "Would you care to go for a tour of the surrounding area? It looks lovely in the sunset."

"That sounds nice. But I have to get dressed, right?"

"It is preferable. There are several males on base that are not attached to anyone and I think

the sight of you in the nude might irritate them."

"Irritate?" That was a new phrase. She had never been called irritating while naked before.

"That you are with me and not them. It is a source of pride that you came back to me after your day of discovery." He chuckled and stroked his hands down her arms. "As tempting as it is to keep you in bed with me, I think it you would better be served if we went out into Morganti."

Reva groaned as she pulled away from him. "Fine. But tonight you are mine." She located her clothing where he had flung it and was dressed in record time. "Let's go."

"Sorry. Images were in my mind after your last sentence." He blinked and stood, his body following where his mind had led.

She fought a giggle as he wrestled his erection into his pants.

Nor froze at the sound of her laughter. "I haven't heard you really laugh before. It's a wonderful sound."

She cocked her head and thought about it. When had she last felt the urge to laugh, the lightening of spirit and release of emotion that accompanied it? Years maybe. The ladies had cracked her emotional barricade with their relentless good humour, and this time spent with Nor had melted the stone around her heart. She let her courting Enjel take her hand to lead her out

into the sunset of Morganti. The sky was calling.

“No, no, no, no and no! My eyeballs will never be clean again.” Reva turned on her companion as he howled with laughter. “Shut up, Nor! You are a freaking seer, didn’t you *see* two fornicating Draï in the sky ahead of you?”

Nor wheezed out between chortles. “You certainly saw them. I am guessing you got a pretty thorough look.”

They were running through the halls to the common room and Nor was having trouble keeping up.

“Time is fluid. I only see my own future. I was so fixated on you that I wasn’t looking around. They weren’t supposed to be back this soon.” His breathing was still erratic, he was trying hard not to laugh. “Livin and Vasu retreated as soon as they realized they had an audience. We are having a meeting tomorrow morning. Do you think you will be able to look either of them in the eye?”

Reva continued to the common room and flung herself onto a sofa, glaring at him as soon as he came into view. Her reaction to the mating Draï was still rippling through her system, and she had never considered herself a voyeur before. She drummed her fingers against the arm of the sofa and scowled.

Nor came to her side and knelt. “I am sorry. I

should have been paying closer attention, but I was so caught up in your enjoyment of the flight that I was distracted."

Mala and Isabi entered the room before she could tell him what to do with his *distraction*.

"Hey, Reva. I have something for you." Mala held a strange conglomeration of wires, headphones and a visor. "It's to help you with your learning issue."

Reva's eyes widened as she took the contraption, "It will help with the reading?"

"I have designed it to use light through your eyelids when you sleep, and an audio cue will read the word. It should work, but testing it on Isabi didn't tell me that much."

The graceful Selna smiled. "I am a poor test subject."

"So I put this on...when?"

"Now. It will start working as soon as you put it on, running through standard vocabulary and mathematics. We can get more advanced as you progress."

Mala helped her adjust it, and the fit became completely comfortable with only a few touches.

"Now, sit back and close your eyes. It will start right away."

Reva did as ordered. Words flowed onto her closed eyes and Isabi's calm voice said the word. "You used Isabi's voice."

"Him? You used his voice?" Nor wasn't impressed.

"You can give a sample for the next batch, Norelios. Isabi was handy and this was kind of an impulse thing." Mala's voice came through the drone of words. "Reva, your writing skills will have to come in the live world. Muscle memory is a harder thing to learn."

"Gotcha." She watched and listened to the Alliance Common alphabet. Keeping her eyes closed made it easier to concentrate, but she could still feel when Nor picked her up and draped her across him. She settled into a comfortable position and then focussed on her lesson.

It was a nice way to spend an evening, in the arms of a lover with friends around. It made a nice change from cowering, waiting for her master to decide that today was the day she would die. That had really sucked.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Her plans for the previous evening had taken a sharp turn with Fixer's learning machine, but both she and Nor had adapted to the change in the schedule. They would have other opportunities to wallow in each other, but one had better come soon or Reva was going to kidnap her Enjel. A warm hand caressed her shoulder.

"Time to wake up, Reva. We have a group meeting in an hour."

"Fine. What's the hurry?" She sat up and stretched. The sheet fell to her hips and she didn't bother to snatch it up. Nor tugged her out of bed and to her feet.

"Mala wants to set your new specs to the suit you had been discussing yesterday." He shoved her clothing at her and took a brush to her hair. "Let's get you moving so you will have time to snack before the meeting starts."

She gave a jaw-cracking yawn, pulling her leggings on while he fussed with her hair. "Were

you a hairdresser in another life? Knock it off." She batted at him as she tried to pull her tunic on. "Let me pull this shirt on before you continue with the scalp torture, please."

"All right. But hurry." He watched impatiently.

She pulled the grey silk over her head and flipped her hair out. In less than two minutes, he made two small braids confining the hair on either side of her face and wrapped them around to knot in the back.

"There. That should keep it out of your face for the rest of the day."

"Thanks. Seer, Enjel, hairdresser, you can do it all."

"Wow. You woke up sarcastic today." He chuckled and hauled her down the hall to Mala's hanger.

"Shut up." Pouting did not seem the way to go, but she was out of witty comebacks. They had slept in the same bed and she hadn't even noticed it at the time. Her brain ached. Perhaps she had the learning machine on too long the night before. She rubbed at her forehead with her free hand as they passed MEDICAL. "Is Hyder up already? I was wondering about the results of my genetic scans."

Nor gave her an odd look and a quirky smile. "Hyder is up and preparing for the meeting. Here we are." He pulled her into a bay that announced

itself as *Fixer's Lair*. "Here is your victim, Mala."

"Excellent. I was beginning to worry." Mala popped out of a nearby shuttle and scurried across the tarmac. "Reva, put this on and we can get to the customization."

A suit flew toward her and she flinched, but caught it. It was a beautiful charcoal grey with a rigid structure underlying the fabric. She looked to Mala, who gestured for her to use a changing screen at the back of the workshop.

The suit fit like a glove and it had a design of studs worked into it in separating bands. "It's great. What are the studs for?" Reva walked out of the changing area and into the gazes of one appreciative Enjel and a focused Moreski.

"Microphones and speakers." Mala only had eyes for the fit of the suit. "The suit will take an average projectile hit, and absorb a fairly powerful energy blast." Her hands ran over the suit, ensuring the fit. "The headset is over here. Smaller than the first one and much more powerful."

A tiara settled on her head with cheek pieces containing the microphone.

"I have something for you as well." Nor held out a package wrapped in scarlet.

Reva looked at it longingly. "If I accept, it may not be tonight that we spend alone."

"I can live with that, as long as you owe me one." He smiled.

She couldn't help it and giggled. "Fine. I accept. Now gimme." She held out her hands and they shook as she opened the box. A beautiful set of boots greeted her. "Oh, Masuo. How lovely." She flipped off her sandals and tried them on. The living boots formed faithfully around her calves and took on the shade and pattern of her new uniform. The boots elevated her heels and she was soon in a comfortable, if occasionally precarious, position.

Mala gestured to the reflective surface on the outside of the privacy screen. "Take a look. Order, you look great."

Curious, she wandered over and struck a pose, hands on her hips. Her hair framed her body in a wild red wave, the two small braids holding the strands off her face. The grey fabric with silver studs was form-fitting and yet had a comfortable amount of flex to it. The boots were just beautiful. "This is wonderful. Thank you so much, Mala." She tried to check out her butt from the back, but the reflection wasn't cooperating.

"Your ass looks fine, Reva. Now, we have to get to the meeting, even Kale is coming." Mala chortled and shooed them out of her workspace. "The boardroom is in hall nineteen."

Together they walked through the halls and it was Reva who made the turn at the designated corridor. The boardroom was almost full. A

Dhemon and a female that she hadn't met before were sitting at the table, looking exhausted. The provided her with warm smiles, however, even though she was pretty sure that Enjels and Dhemons were enemies. The other couple she remembered with clarity. "Vasu, Livin. It is nice to see you...dressed."

Vasu barked with laughter.

Reva could feel Nor shuddering with the urge to laugh next to her. They took their seats and waited for Hyder while making introductions amongst themselves. Agreha and Haaro had just completed an assignment of a political nature and had just returned that morning. They wanted to sleep as soon as they were authorized to do so.

"Authorized to sleep? Are you serious?"

"Haaro is exaggerating. He drops off at the littlest bit of provocation. And he snores. Loudly." The group laughed at Agreha's comments and she was just taking a breath to pick on her mate again when Hyder and another male entered.

"Reva, I believe that you are the only one who hasn't met Kale."

The new male of unidentified species spoke. "Indeed. Reva, I am the Avatar of the planet we stand on. You are all gathered here today to help Morganti. There is a large comet heading toward our planet and I need to know what we can do to divert it." Kale reached out and triggered a

display of an enormous ball of gasses and dirt with Morganti as the projected destination.

Everyone fell silent at the sign of natural destruction and looked at each other, then back to Kale and Hyder.

"I want all of you to think, in your travels, have you heard of anything that could possibly stop, or slow, this comet down?"

Mala cleared her throat. "I think I know what we need, but I don't know where to find it."

"What is it, Mala?" Isabi was a little surprised, but a coaxing note had entered his tone.

"A Star Breaker. I don't know what it is, but the W'Chon speak of it in hushed tones. They have used it on their mining colonies to break up asteroids."

"Where did you hear about it?"

"On Kaddaka. Drunk miners talk a lot. They were fuzzy on the details, but it is a good lead. In the meantime, I can work on some kind of a deflection array."

Hyder stepped forward. "No. We need to have an evacuation plan in place and that will include enough shuttle transport to get everyone off Morganti, if necessary."

"Alright, I will draw up plans."

Reva sat astonished as the Guard made plans for a future that may not come to pass. She looked to Nor and smiled. Whatever came of this event,

she would have her Enjel and he would have her.
She had already made her Leap of Faith.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Sector Guard will continue in *Star Breaker*, where Kale has to venture away from his planet in order to save it.

Guardian Enjel was the first book of mine that featured this natural enemies of the Dhemons, and it will be available in November from Extasy Books.

I hope you have enjoyed this time with Reva and her Enjel, you can see them and all of the other Guards in *Star Breaker*.

<http://www.violagrace.com>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there.

She has no pets and can barely keep sea monkeys alive for a reasonable amount of time. Her line of day job tends to be analytical which leaves her mind hopping to weave stories. No co-worker is safe from her character analysis.

In keeping with busy hands are happy hands, her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain mail, and a few others that have been forgotten. It is quite often that these hobbies make their way into her tales.

Viola's fetishes include boots and corsetry, and her greatest weakness is her uncontrollable blush.

Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. It is an admirable thing and something that we should all strive for. To find one that we truly like, as well as love.

Viola can be reached at this email:

viola@violagrace.com

Viola's website is located at:

<http://www.violagrace.com>